

2975 Laurel Street #20
San Diego, California 92104
February 9, 1989

Dear Judy,

It was really great to hear from you. Thanks for all your news and comments and memories that you shared in your Christmas note. Regarding your observation that my AIDS diagnosis had seemed to give me a reason for living, I have to say that that you are partially correct. I think that I've always had a commitment to living, but any "terminal" diagnosis does produce a re-assessment of one's life and goals. I have long been dedicated to community work, but my AIDS diagnosis has given me a renewed sense of urgency about getting certain things done.

Strangely enough, it has also brought a heightened sense of what is really important and a consequent sense of peacefulness. I have examined my life and the body of work that I have produced over the past twenty years or so, and I feel pretty good about it. One of the fears that I had during the last few years prior to diagnosis, when I was exhibiting all sorts of "pre-AIDS" symptoms, was that I would become socially isolated if I developed "full-blown AIDS". In fact, the exact opposite has happened. I am almost daily moved to tears by acts of kindness of every sort imaginable and from people from whom I never expected it.

The lesbian/gay community of San Diego has given new meaning to words like "family" and "community". The outpouring of cards, letters, phone calls, visits, offers of help around the apartment, grocery shopping, washing my car, food preparation, taking me out to meals and movies seems endless. When I make an appearance at a community function such as a banquet or a fund-raising event, there is usually a steady stream of men and women who come by my table, touch me, hug me, tell me of their love, respect, and prayers in my behalf. Occasionally, a total stranger will approach me and say something like, "You don't know me but I have been aware of your work for many years and you have made a very positive difference in my life." How could I not be moved and uplifted by such support?

A few weeks ago, someone anonymously ran the following ad in the classified section of one of the local gay/lesbian newspapers: "JESS JESSOP--Thank you for all that you do and have done. You are an inspiration to gay people everywhere. Thank you, thank you, thank you." What a lovely gesture. I could not speak of it for days without getting choked up.

Some days I am too weak and short of breath to do much more than sit or lie around. Some days I am too fatigued to even shower or shave. But most days I am able to not only take care of activities of daily living but can get a lot of work done on the Archives materials that I currently house in my home. I am still coordinator of the planning committee for the Lesbian & Gay Archives of San Diego. I make it to most of the meetings and preside over them.

I am currently in the sixth day of a planned 21-day course of treatments with aerosolyzed Pentamidine which I administer to myself each morning. Within the next week or so I will be beginning an experimental program of hyperimmune plasma therapy. The program doesn't have any track record here in the US but

has shown promising results in Europe. I practice good nutritional habits, do a lot of work with subliminal tapes, guided imagery, healing affirmation, and learning self love. I am also in a program of weekly therapeutic massage. I am committed not only to living with AIDS but to recovering from AIDS. In spite of the message that we get from the mainstream press, AIDS is not invariably fatal. There are a growing number of survivors, and I am very encouraged by that. I plan to be among them.

Last March, at our (lesbian/gay) annual community awards ceremony, I was presented with the "Harvey Milk Memorial Award"--my community's highest award. As part of my acceptance speech, I said, "I don't know who chooses the recipient for this award or exactly what criteria are used in making that decision, but I hope that I was not selected because they thought that this might be the last chance that they'd have to give Jess Jessop an award...(The audience was all aware of my diagnosis.) ...because I'll be back here next year competing for other awards. There were over 700 people in that ballroom and they all rose to their feet and cheered and stomped and roared their approval. What a thrill! What a night!... and a few tears for Jess, I might add.

As you may know, I've been happily single all of my life. I've had a few meaningful relationships over the years, but I've never seriously considered settling down into a primary relationship. I was always "too busy" to take the time that a monogamous relationship would require. Now, ironically, at a time in my life when I would have predicted an accentuation of my "singleness", the reverse has happened. A man by the name of Michael Killian has come into my life and given me yet one more reason to recover. We haven't "taken any vows" or proclaimed anything from the rooftops, but the relationship is very special and brightens my every day. Mike is very attentive, always seems to know the "right" thing to say or do, and never ceases to amaze me with his thoughtfulness and tenderness. I can't remember being more compatible with another human being--spiritually, philosophically, politically, intellectually, and just in the way we relate to other people. Sounds too good to be true. I won't say that I'm waiting for the bubble to burst, but I am taking it slow and proceeding with caution. Nevertheless, Mike is currently a source of great happiness for me, and consequently makes a very positive difference in my physical well being.

I'm enclosing a copy of my "January letter" that I sent to many folks with my belated holiday greetings. I don't have any more of the "cards" referred to in the letter but I am sending a photo that was reproduced as part of my holiday card.

There is a remote possibility of my traveling up to the bay area in the spring to visit folks. If that actually takes place, I'll surely drop in on you folks. 'Til then, know that I love you, think of you often and remember our times together with great fondness. Be of good cheer.

Love in the struggle,

Jess